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DEPARTMENT FOR EAP/RSP AND EAP/MTS FORSYTH
DEFENSE FOR OSD/ISP

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SUBJECT: BRUNEI WELCOMES USG ARF PROPOSALS

REF: STATE 8005

SUMMARY

¶1. (SBU) DCM delivered reftel points on January 31 to Datin Masrainah Ahmad, Deputy Permanent Secretary at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade. Masrainah responded that Brunei supported efforts to strengthen ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) institutions and welcomed, without endorsing, the U.S. proposal for focusing Counter Terrorism and Transnational Crime (CTTC) work in the ARF. The Government of Brunei (GoB) welcomes ARF initiatives in preventative diplomacy, but favors a go-slow approach to ARF expansion until current reform initiatives are consolidated. Similarly, the GoB is still studying the idea of an ASEAN Defense Ministers Plus meeting, but wants to avoid overlap or duplication of existing defense forums. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (SBU) DCM delivered reftel points and non-paper on January 31 to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade (MoFAT) Deputy Permanent Secretary who covers ASEAN and ARF issues, Datin Masrainah Ahmad.

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Joining the meeting were MoFAT Director for ASEAN Affairs Latif Tuah and the desk officers working directly on ARF issues. Masrainah responded that Brunei agrees that it is important to improve the decision-making process of the ARF, strengthen its internal mechanisms, and improve the management and coordination of the forum generally.

¶3. (SBU) On specific proposals, Masrainah welcomed the USG concept for a more focused CTTC work plan. She expected that this would be a major focus of discussions for the April meeting in Ottawa and said that Brunei would like to see consensus reached in time for the Ministers to consider at the July meeting. Without endorsing it, Masrainah also commented favorably on the EU proposal to give senior officials a broader mandate to make more routine decisions.

¶4. (SBU) Masrainah said a priority for Brunei would also be moving forward on the concepts outlined in the ARF Vision Paper from 2002. The GoB found current confidence-building work very useful and welcomed the recent move to work more on preventative diplomacy capabilities. Brunei would like to see the establishment of a Peace Keeping Operations Center, either as a new entity or as an extension of the existing regional risk reduction center.

¶5. (SBU) On ARF expansion to new members, Masrainah was cautious about endorsing any one view, but indicated that Brunei would likely favor a go-slow approach. She said that it would be better to see existing cooperative initiatives consolidated with current members before considering expansion of the ARF to countries like Kazakhstan or Sri Lanka.

¶6. (SBU) In response to our questions about the proposed ASEAN Defense Ministers Plus meeting, Masrainah said that Brunei is not ready to endorse the concept paper. Internal GoB discussions on this are ongoing, and MoFAT is concerned about this concept overlapping or duplicating existing Defense Ministers groupings in the Asia Pacific. She said that ASEAN was exploring the idea of an ARF Defense Officials meeting, with an emphasis on greater military exchanges and table-top exercises.

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